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Photo by Edward Smith | Michael Olujic, general manager for Tachi Palace, shows off some of the luxury flourishes of a newly renovated hotel room at the Lemoore casino, part of a \$90 million renovation.

PERIODICAL:  
TIME  
SENSITIVE  
PRIORITY  
HANDLING



# TYRONE RODERICK WILLIAMS

CEO | FRESNO HOUSING

**EDUCATION:** I HAVE A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE FROM PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY IN TEXAS. WHILE I WAS THERE, I REALIZED NOT ONLY DID I WANT TO KNOW HOW TO DESIGN BUILDINGS, BUT I ALSO WANTED TO KNOW HOW TO CONSTRUCT THE BUILDING, FINANCE THE BUILDING AND LEASE, RENT OR SELL THEM. MY INSTRUCTORS TOLD ME THAT'S CALLED REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT. I DETERMINED THEN THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO DO. AFTER I GRADUATED FROM PRAIRIE VIEW AT THE TOP OF MY CLASS, I WAS OFFERED A FULL SCHOLARSHIP TO THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR A MASTER OF CITY PLANNING. THAT'S WHERE I REALLY BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO DEAL WITH THE COMPLEX FINANCING OF AFFORDABLE FINANCING AND HOW I CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT THE LIVES OF RESIDENTS IN THE COMMUNITIES. THAT'S WHERE I DRANK THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD-REVITALIZATION KOOL-AID. **| AGE:** YOU MAY NOT ASK THAT. **| FAMILY:** I HAVE A WIFE WHO IS MY FIRST AND ONLY GIRLFRIEND. WE JUST CELEBRATED 24 YEARS OF MARRIAGE. WE HAVE TWO INCREDIBLE DAUGHTERS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE YOUNG ADULTS AND JUST STARTED THEIR CAREERS. IT IS AMAZING TO WATCH THEM ENTER INTO CAREERS AND ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS LEADERS AND THAT BRINGS US AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF JOY.



## What we do:

We provide opportunities to enhance the lives of residents through housing and partnership with agencies that provide ladders of opportunities for the entire family — both from education as well as economic development and family self-sufficiency opportunities.

## Tell us a little about your career to your current position.

I worked at a community development corporation at the neighborhood level, developing affordable housing. I've been the president of an affordable housing home-building company in Houston. I've lead the largest public housing revitalization effort in Atlanta, Georgia. I've worked as the deputy executive director of development in Sacramento prior to assuming the role of CEO here.

## How do you describe your leadership style?

I am a democratic-servant leader. I listen to differing points of view and gather as much credible information as possible before making significant decisions about the work of the agency. I don't mind hearing opposing or differing points of view. The other side of that is the servant leader. I am engaged in the work. I'm not a micro-manager, but I believe in understanding in what's happening at the grassroots level, what's happening in the neighborhood by hearing and then participating with our neighbors and our communities and our residents.

## What would you like to tackle first?

Creating a very supportive and inclusive culture, and we've already started that, but I'm going to take it to a whole new level. We have a number of different projects including the California Avenue Neighborhood planning initiative. That's going to be transformational and I want to make sure that gets the proper attention and focus that it deserves. At the same time, we're partnering with the City and other partners in looking at creating housing opportunities for those emerging from homelessness, partnering with our college institutions in creating student housing, and partnering with other agencies at creating housing for first-time home buyers.

## What approaches to tackling homelessness and housing affordability have you seen be successful in other areas?

There are two aspects in really addressing the homeless challenge. One involves using the housing first model, which is before you can help anybody, whatever challenges they have in life, they've got to have secure housing. That becomes the foundation for which all the other positive attributes build upon. There are many different ways to achieve that. We're working with the City in looking at Project HomeKey prospects for funding housing initiatives. But there's the other side that is equally as important and often underestimated or minimized — the long-term support that is required to transform people who have experienced chronic homelessness due to drug addiction and mental illness. Just providing housing alone in no way is addressing the homeless problem. You have to couple that with the kind of services and long-term operating support that continues to support those services over the long haul.

## How has Project HomeKey changed the approach organizations take in creating housing?

Project HomeKey has really been a game changer across the state because it's provided the badly needed resources to cities to acquire hotels and motels. The other side of that is because now hotel and motel owners across the state

understand that HomeKey is providing significant resources, we've seen a drastic increase in the sales prices of these properties. Many of these owners see this as their golden parachute. We've seen that price significantly increase.

## What are your thoughts on the Central Valley so far?

I see the Central Valley as poised for transformation. I say that because I've had the opportunity to sit down with a number of community leaders who are literally all on the same page about the need for transformation across the City of Fresno and throughout Fresno County. That is rare to have an alignment of expectations and acknowledgment of past challenges that have led to the current conditions. But there is a unified voice in recognizing that we can't change the past but we can create a brighter future and do what we can to remedy the issues of the past that lead to the current challenges that we face. I'm very optimistic about moving the Central Valley forward. That's why I accepted the job to come here. I want to be a part of creating what the new Central Valley will be in the coming decades and even centuries.

## What is the best part of your job?

We get to change lives for the better.

## The most challenging?

There are only 24 hours in a day. There is so much work to do you just have to identify the top priorities and whittle your way on down. We also have to find additional financial resources to move our vision forward.

## I always have time for:

I have to make so many decisions, but I always have to make time to pause to pray before I make a significant decision. Always. I'm never too busy to pause to get some divine inspiration and direction before making a decision.

## I have no patience for:

Egos.

## What was your very first job and what did you learn from it?

I worked for a landscaping company in Crosby, Texas, which is my little hometown. It was the only landscaping company there. I love horticulture. My job was to install plants in a new subdivision for homeowners. Every day I would walk up to a brand new house that had just dirt in the front yard and I'd start digging holes and planting plants and creating flower beds and envisioning what they would look like after they matured and I did all that in Texas heat. It was so fulfilling because I would come to the house in the morning, and when I left in the afternoon the plants would be installed and it would look very different. It would not just be a house. I have been about transformation since my very first job.

## What do you like to do in your spare time?

I love cooking. Cooking is like edible artistry. You take some of this and you take some of that and you create a dish that satisfies those you serve the food to. Coming here to Fresno, I'm going to spend some time in the mountains. I have never lived as close to the great outdoors as I live now and I just want to spend some time admiring the masterful handiwork of the great outdoors.